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TAGS: PREL KPAL IS MU

SUBJECT: OMANI FOREIGN MINISTER TO ISRAELI MINISTER LIVNI:
NEW PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT "A STEP FORWARD"

REF: A. STATE 16868

1B. MUSCAT 00073
1C. 06 MUSCAT 01735

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) Summary: Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yousef bin Alawi met privately this week with Israeli Foreign Minister Livni in Madrid. Their brief talks focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the announcement of a Palestinian national unity government, which Oman sees as a possible "turning point" in getting Hamas to abandon violence. Meeting with the Ambassador, Bin Alawi advised the U.S. to reserve judgment and focus on actions of the new Palestinian government, rather than rhetoric from Hamas officials. End Summary.

BREAKFAST IN SPAIN

12. (C) In a February 11 face-to-face meeting covering a range of issues (septels), bin Alawi told the Ambassador that his relaxed "working breakfast" with Livni in Madrid had gone "very well." He explained that he had talked with Livni in Spain to "follow up" on the informal agreement he and his Israeli counterpart made at the last UN General Assembly to meet periodically, when possible (ref B). While commenting that he was "impressed" with Livni personally and her vision for the region, bin Alawi said that no new developments had come from their dialogue. Most of the ideas and opinions exchanged were already known to both sides, he remarked. Bin Alawi shared that he had also told Livni that their meetings would have to remain discrete, and that Omani-Israeli relations could only expand gradually "as the situation permits." Despite press speculation to the contrary, bin Alawi told the Ambassador that he understood from his talks with Livni that Israel had no official contacts with either Saudi Arabia or Syria, although Livni seemed "very interested" in establishing a dialogue with the Saudis.

13. (C) Bin Alawi continued that Livni did not directly raise Israeli concerns with either Iran or Syria, although this was probably because their time together in Madrid was limited. Instead, the Israeli FM focused primarily on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the announcement of a Palestinian national unity government. Bin Alawi said that he told Livni that while the agreement reached in Mecca was "not perfect," it nevertheless constituted an important "step forward" and could represent a "turning point" in getting Hamas to accept the positions of the international community. He reminded her that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) had earlier "transformed itself" through dialogue and negotiations, and emphasized that Abu Mazen - unlike Yaser Arafat - remained committed to signing a final peace agreement with Israel.

LOOK AT ACTIONS, NOT WORDS

¶4. (C) The Ambassador expressed ref A points to bin Alawi, stressing that the U.S. would carefully monitor both the words and deeds of the new Palestinian unity government. The Omani FM responded that while he understood the reasons for taking a "cautious approach," he nevertheless hoped that the U.S. would focus on the actions of the Palestinian government, rather than rhetoric from some of its members, particularly lower-level Hamas officials who were unhappy with the accord reached in Mecca. "What happens on the ground is the most important thing," urged bin Alawi. He further advised the international community to "not talk about the Quartet principles too much" as this could "impede the way forward." The Ambassador reminded the minister that the Quartet principles remained the basis for any U.S. and Quartet engagement with Hamas. Bin Alawi finally noted that during his recent trip to Damascus (septel), he had talked with a "Hamas leader" (not Khaled Meshaal) who had remarked that "we're in a different era now; the world needs to help us keep (the Mecca agreement) going."

GRAPPO